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ABSTRACT

Northeast Louisiana University's Professional Semester began in 1976 to respond to a need for more practical application of what was taught in the required methods courses of the elementary education degree program. It was designed to avoid duplication of generic activities and to let students apply theory and teaching techniques in the classroom. It offered instruction at the university and real teaching experience in public schools (while supervised by expert teachers). The courses were in elementary science, math, language arts, and social studies. Each offered philosophies and theories for the content area plus instruction on materials, teaching methods, and techniques. To determine program effectiveness, students were surveyed at the end of the spring and fall semesters for 6 years, examining their attitudes toward theory and practical application in teacher education. The study noted whether they felt competent about subject matter, audiovisuals, classroom management and routine, and communication. Results found their attitudes more positive in the fall on all four measures. There was more disagreement between groups about subject matter and less disagreement regarding audiovisuals. Students felt well-prepared in communication. (SM)

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**AN INVESTIGATION OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES
TOWARD THEORY AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION
IN TEACHER PREPARATION**

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According to the NCATE book for accreditation (1990), field-based experience can be defined as "those that are conducted at a school site, a school administration center, a school clinic, community agency." Posner (1989) stated that all teaching situations have four common features: 1.) teacher, 2.) learner, 3.) subject matter, and 4.) context. The first three components (teacher, learner, subject matter) are all grounded within the context for providing a social and physical component. In order to insure comprehensive field experiences to the student teacher, preservice teachers should be exposed to the classroom setting during clinical experiences and prior to the student teaching component. Hosford (1984) cited Madeline Hunter as advocating a preservice program that is theory-based and is modeled by professors and supervising teachers in the field. Future teachers should be provided the opportunity to apply this theory in guided practices with either mini-lessons or direct classroom placement.

Fischetti, Maloy, and Heffley (88-89) described how undergraduates were involved in tutoring in the secondary schools in the community. Even though only 20% of the research participants were education majors, comments from the study revealed that tutoring presented a practical perspective for whether or not to enter the teaching profession. If on-site experiences could act as catalysts for teacher education majors, perhaps scheduled classroom involvement is deemed necessary in all teacher education programs.

The concept of the Professional Semester in the College of Education at Northeast Louisiana University originated in 1975 when the need was

recognized for more practical application of what was being taught in the required methods courses of the elementary education degree program. At that time, five instructors taught five separate three-hour courses: methods in language arts, math, science, social studies, and children's literature. An examination of course outlines of these courses and subsequent discussions with involved faculty revealed much duplication of generic-type activities, such as lesson planning, unit planning, and writing instructional objectives. In addition, it was recognized by the instructors in elementary education that the students needed an opportunity to apply the theory and teaching techniques in the "real" classroom.

Throughout the Spring semester, 1976, the instructors involved identified areas of commonality in the methods classes, arranged a twenty-hour weekly block of time which included a three-hour generic session, and arranged a four hour practicum to be done during the last four weeks of the professional semester. Plans were made for instructors to team teach the generic sessions, utilizing their particular strengths, and to actually go to the schools during the practicum phase to closely monitor the students in planning and teaching.

The Professional Semester plan was first implemented during the Fall Semester, 1976. Over a 15 year period, the program has grown from an enrollment of approximately twenty-five students in a single section class to over seventy-five students in three sections of each class. The methods course in Children's Literature has since been moved to accompany the reading block; and, a course in tests and measurements has

been scheduled to be taken concurrently with the professional block classes.

Originally students could choose to take either methods in science or social studies. Today, both methods are required in the program. The number of cooperating schools has grown from two to six; the number of cooperating teachers has grown from twenty-five to over seventy-five, in keeping with enrollment increases.

The Professional Semester for elementary education consists of 12-13 weeks for instruction classes on the University campus and 4-5 weeks of actual teaching in public schools near the University.

The professional courses which comprise the 12 hour block include:

ELED 315	M-M in Elementary Science	3 hours
ELED 316	M-M in Elementary Math	3 hours
ELED 317	M-M in Language Arts	3 hours
ELED 318	M-M in Elementary Social Studies	3 hours

Each course includes the philosophies and theories (Bruner, Piaget, Gagne, Thorndike, Bloom, Dewey) unique to the content area, along with instruction related to materials, techniques, and methods of teaching. The curriculum includes generic components such as writing behavioral objectives, planning lessons and units, constructing instructional teaching aids, conducting questioning strategies, and employing techniques of classroom management. A calender of these specific generic sessions is given to each student at the beginning of each semester. Beginning the Fall

semester, 1990, a classroom management component was added to accompany the generic sessions. This course presents current trends, authorities, and techniques for managing an elementary classroom.

The practicum phase of the Professional Semester provides prospective teachers an opportunity to gain valuable field experiences under the close supervision of outstanding classroom teachers who are first recommended by their principals and then volunteer to participate. Inservice, to explain the roles of the participants, teacher, and University supervisors, is conducted prior to Block students entering the practicum phase. This aspect of the Professional Semester is conducted in several Ouachita Parish and Monroe City Elementary schools. Schools are selected to provide students with opportunities to work with multicultural and exceptional populations. During the instructional phase, each student presents lessons in the content areas to fellow students. Five university supervisors, assisted by two graduate assistants, work with the students on-site to provide ideas, models, and techniques for specific instructional situations.

Prior to beginning the practicum phase, students are scheduled to visit the assigned classroom teachers for a total of three days. During the first few days of the practicum phase, students are encouraged to keep a recorded account of meaningful observations and to focus on class routines, teacher responsibilities, and characteristics of the students themselves. As the preservice teachers develop skill, competence, and self-confidence, they move from teaching a small group to teaching the entire class. Each professional semester intern has the responsibility of

planning and teaching a minimum of one lesson during the four-hour period he/she is in the school each day. Each professional semester intern works with individual students who need assistance, prepares materials and media for use in the classroom, and learns how to observe and analyze classroom processes. The aim of this field experience is to expose students to a variety of teaching situations and help them realize the diverse cultures and backgrounds in this geographic area.

Each lesson taught requires of the prospective teacher detailed planning for lesson objectives, motivation, procedures, selection of learning materials, and lesson evaluation. Self-evaluations, conducted after each class presentation, reveal much thought and insight on the part of the apprentice. Classroom teachers regularly check plans, offering helpful suggestions and evaluations. University personnel, involved in the program, observe and evaluate the student based on personal characteristics, professional qualities, and teaching techniques. Block students provide feedback to the university instructors about the teaching and learning portion of the Professional Semester by completing evaluation forms at the end of the on-campus work. Fifteen hours of observation credit (in the tutorial, monitorial, and instructional phases) are given for each three hour course taken in the Professional Semester Block.

In order to determine the effectiveness of the program, a survey questionnaire is administered to block students at the conclusion of each semester. Since 1985, a survey has been administered to all block students at the conclusion of the semester.

Problem:

The problem of this study was to ascertain the preservice teachers' attitudes toward theory and practical application in teacher preparation.

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis was that no significant differences existed between the spring and fall semesters of preservice teachers' attitudes on teacher preparation.

Instrumentation:

A survey containing 31 questions was administered to the professional block students at the end of each spring and fall semester for the six consecutive years of 1985-1991, making a composite of 12 semesters. The questionnaire was based on a 5 point likert-type scale having the categories of: strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The questionnaire was administered after each student has received his/her grade for each course in the professional block. Therefore, responses could not be pre-determined by anticipated grades or students' attitudes toward the professor. The survey was anonymous containing only the date of administration.

Since the purpose of this study was to determine whether students felt competent in the four subscales, the "no opinion" category was omitted in the analysis of data and the cells of "strongly agree" and

"agree" were collapsed into the "agree" category as were the categories of "strongly disagree" and "disagree" into the category of "disagree."

Using the Chronbach Alpha Coefficient, the reliability of the questionnaire was .90. The population for the study was the 603 that were enrolled in the professional block classes over the past 12 consecutive semesters. The categories of the questionnaire were divided into four criterion measures: subject matter, audio-visual, classroom management and routines, and communications. The reliability of the four subscales ranged from .65 to .77.

Analysis of Data:

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi Square. The 31 questions were categorized into four criterion measures: subject matter, audio-visual, classroom management and routines, and communications. Each criterion measure contained 3 to 11 questions. The four criterion measures were used to test for "general" significant differences between the spring and fall semester preservice teachers' attitudes on teacher preparation.

Table 1 shows that the fall and spring semester preservice teachers' opinions were significantly different ($p < .01$) on all four subscales. The table indicates that 99% of the fall and 95% of the spring preservice teachers believed they were taught how to properly communicate with students, college professors, classroom teachers, administrators, and parents. In the area of audio-visual, the overall average was 91% where 95% of the fall semester and 88% of the spring semester students felt competent in operating audio-visual equipment and media during regular classroom settings. The area of classroom management and routines

TABLE I
A COMPARISON OF THE SPRING AND FALL PRESERVICE
TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE
PROFESSIONAL BLOCK OVER FOUR
CRITERION MEASURES

Criterion Measure	N	X	sd	t
<u>Subject Matter</u>				
Spring	345	17.29	4.9	6.16*
Fall	247	15.06	3.9	
<u>Audio-Visual</u>				
Spring	347	6.11	2.3	3.49*
Fall	255	5.50	1.9	
<u>Classroom Management and Routines</u>				
Spring	344	16.97	5.0	4.81*
Fall	253	15.09	4.5	
<u>Communication</u>				
Spring	303	18.76	5.3	6.18*
Fall	229	16.17	4.4	

*p.≤ .01

maintained an overall average of 90%, with 94% of the fall and 86% of the spring students feeling better guided toward writing goals, objectives, lesson plans, and units. The final criterion measure of subject matter revealed an overall of 85% with 94% of the fall semester and 79% of the spring semester preservice teachers feeling better prepared for teaching methods courses in the areas of elementary education.

The four criterion measures for each year, the area of subject matter was significant each time. Table II shows there was a significant difference between the fall and spring preservice teachers' attitudes toward subject matter. The fall semester preservice teachers felt more secure in teaching the subject matter areas of science, mathematics, language arts, and social studies. On the other three criterion measures studied, there were no significant differences between the fall and spring semester attitudes for the year of 1985. In 1987, there were no significant differences on three of the criterion measures--audio-visual, classroom management and routines, and communication. However, there was a significant difference in the area of subject matter. During the academic year of 1988, no significant differences appeared at the $p < .05$ level. For the years of 1989 and 1990, there were significant differences in the areas of subject matter and communication. In 1989, an additional significant difference was found in the area of classroom management and routines. The preservice teachers' attitudes appeared to be more positive for the fall semesters than they did for the spring semesters.

TABLE II
A COMPARISON OF THE FOUR CRITERION MEASURES
BY SEMESTER FOR FIVE YEARS

	FALL		SPRING		p
	X	sd	X	sd	
<u>1985</u>					
*Subject Matter	1.5	.5	1.8	.8	.02
Audio Visual	1.5	.5	1.8	1.0	.17
Classroom Management and Routines	1.3	.5	1.4	.6	.57
Communication	1.3	.5	1.4	.6	.44
<u>1987</u>					
*Subject Matter	1.6	.7	2.0	.6	.00
Audio Visual	1.6	.7	1.7	1.0	.43
Classroom Management and Routines	1.5	.7	1.7	.8	.17
Communication	1.3	.5	1.4	.5	.44
<u>1988</u>					
Subject Matter	1.7	.6	1.8	.6	.38
Audio Visual	1.7	.9	1.8	.9	.28
Classroom Management and Routines	1.5	.7	1.7	.7	.24
Communication	1.1	.4	1.3	.5	.44
<u>1989</u>					
*Subject Matter	1.7	.7	2.1	.8	.01
Audio Visual	1.6	.7	1.9	.9	.15
*Classroom Management and Routines	1.3	.5	1.8	.8	.00
*Communication	1.1	.4	1.5	.6	.01
<u>1990</u>					
*Subject Matter	1.7	.6	2.3	1.0	.00
Audio Visual	1.6	.8	1.9	1.0	.35
Classroom Management and Routines	1.6	.6	1.9	.8	.08
*Communication	1.3	.4	1.5	.6	.01

*p ≤ .05

The overall comparisons of the totals for the fall and spring semesters revealed significant differences on all four criterion measures (see Table III). The total amount of subjects differed in range from 229-347 per group. In each criterion measure, the fall semester preservice teachers' attitudes appeared more positive than did the attitudes of the preservice teachers in the spring.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

1. The attitudes of the preservice teachers were more positive in the fall semester than they were for the spring semester on all four criterion measures.
2. There was more disagreement between the fall and spring semester students on the criterion measure of subject matter.
3. There appeared to be little disagreement between the fall and spring semester students on the criterion measure of audio-visual.
4. Students indicated they were well prepared in the area of communication.

TABLE III

THE PERCENTAGE OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS
WHO AGREED OR DISAGREED ON FOUR
CRITERION MEASURES IN
TEACHER PREPARATION

<u>Criterion Measures</u>	<u>Spring</u>	<u>Fall</u>	<u>Average</u>
Communication			
Agree	95	99	96*
Disagree	00	00	
Audio Visual			
Agree	88	95	91*
Disagree	09	03	
Classroom Management and Routines			
Agree	86	94	90*
Disagree	02	01	
Subject Matter			
Agree	79	94	85*
Disagree	05	01	

* $p \leq .01$

Implications:

1. Students entering the fall classes have had a longer time for rest before beginning the semester, therefore they have a more positive attitude toward the classes.
2. Students entering the spring classes are asked to participate in additional extracurricular activities, i.e. the social studies and science fairs., and therefore may have more negative feelings toward the block class.

Recommendations:

1. Investigate why the preservice teachers' attitudes were more positive in the fall than those of the spring semester.
2. Investigate whether this spring/fall variable exist in the professors' attitudes as it does with the students.
3. Administer the questionnaire as a pre and post survey for the professional block students to determine if the attitudes change during the semester of methods.
4. Offer extra credit for participating in the extracurricular activities associated with the spring semester i.e. social studies fair, science fairs.

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